

THE BREVITY OF TIME

Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses wherein we find the contrast between the brevity of human existence and the eternity of God. Moses exalts the LORD as he ponders on His eternity, expressing awe at the thought that before anything came into existence – from eternity past to eternity future – He is God (v. 2). In contrast, man’s life is likened to a flood (in its swiftness), to a sleep (in its briefness), and to the grass (in its fleetingness since it grows up in the morning and withers in the evening) (vv. 5-6).

OUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED!

Our life on earth is lived out within that short span of time that God has allotted unto us, to which we cannot add. We “spend our years as a tale that is told ... for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (vv. 9-10). Truly, time on earth is short!

Time is Fleeting

Like the shadow and the dew, time appears for a moment and is gone the next. “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding” (1 Chronicles 29:15). “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is

your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14).

Time’s fleetingness draws attention to its shortness. “LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee” (Psalm 39:4-5). “Handbreadth” is the measure of length based on the width of the palm of one’s hand – symbolic of our life’s brevity.

Time Swiftly Passes By

Moreover, time slips away so easily. The ticking of the clock is a constant reminder – the seconds fly so fast and soon turn into minutes, with the minutes giving way to hours, and hours into days without interruption. It just keeps on going; time won’t wait for us even “for another minute”! This fact is corroborated by Scripture – “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and are spent without hope” (Job 7:6); also “my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good” (Job 9:25). Little wonder why we often feel that there is not enough time in a day to accomplish everything that needs to be done.



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Time is Easily Lost

On the other side of the coin, time often appears to be so abundant to some that it does not seem to matter much if they squander some of it. This is particularly true of the “sluggard”, whom the book of Proverbs condemns for being lazy and wasting his time away (Proverbs 6:6-11). We must vigilantly guard ourselves against such slothful attitude. Remember that time is even more valuable than money, as no amount of money can buy us time. And lost time can never be regained – once it’s gone, it’s gone forever!

Time Will Surely Come to an End

One more sobering fact about time’s brevity: time spent on this earth will soon be over as God has appointed. “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Truly, “the days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10). We may be in our prime today and our end may seem anything but near, yet the fact remains: our time sooner or later would be over. Disasters and calamities the world over are constant reminders of how short and transitory life is. Indeed, there is a time limit to our life on earth, which is not in our control.

SO LET US NUMBER OUR DAYS

Realising this, what then should our attitude be towards our limited days? Moses, after his contemplation on the brevity of his lifetime, expresses his petition in v. 12 – “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

To many people, to “number our days” means to practise time management. Thus, we have planners, timetables, checklists, calendars, post-its, “to-do” lists, appointment

books and electronic organizers that require us to assign priorities, set goals and plan daily. No doubt, all these have helped many, but managing our time is more than just plotting our appointments and activities – it involves keeping careful watch over how we spend our time, which in turn is governed by how we set our priorities. It means optimizing the time available to us in our planning, and deciding which activities deserve more time and which deserve less. In a way, to “number our days” does not simply mean counting our days, but making every day count!

Many people find themselves busy with many things in a day, only to realise that they have missed out on something which is often the most substantial matter of the day. Yet others struggle in getting things done and find it difficult to accomplish everything that they need to do, complaining in the end that they do not have enough time. Perhaps they wish they had a 36-hour day or a 8-day week, or wish they could be like Joshua who was granted the request for “the sun to stand still” (cf. Joshua 10:13), in order to finish the job. Be that as it may, the problem is often not a lack of time, but the unwise use of our time. If we find ourselves struggling to accomplish something because of what seems to be a shortage of time, it could probably be due to our failure to “number our days”!

POINTERS INVOLVED IN NUMBERING OUR DAYS

To “number our days” would involve the application of the Biblical principles that can be drawn from what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:15-17.

Walk Circumspectly [v. 15]

There is a need for us to walk “circumspectly” (or “carefully”). Unlike a fool who walks carelessly as if he is going to live forever, we must be wise enough to realise that our limited time on earth is entirely in God’s

hand. In the gospels, we often read of Jesus rebuking those who (like the rich fool) fail to realise this. What is the use of all our wealth and possessions if our life were to end today? Our time on earth is limited. Year after year, we celebrate birthdays and anniversaries. While these are occasions of rejoicing, they are also reminders that our “numbered” days are actually coming closer to the end. We never know how much time God has given us to live or how quickly it will all end.

That being so, using this life as preparation for life eternal, living our lives and using our time with eternity in view, is true wisdom. Everything here is passing away, so we must not get settled down here as if this is our home. Life is too short to be careless and indifferent to spiritual things. Be awakened and commit your life to serve the Lord. One day, we would have to give an account to God on how we have used our time. The wise use of time prepares us for eternity.

For the unbeliever, now is the time to make that wise decision to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus – to confess one’s sins, to believe in Jesus and to receive Him as one’s Lord and Saviour. Time has been wasted, and it will matter throughout eternity how time here is used to respond to Christ. Once that line has been crossed, there will be no second chance!

Understanding the Will of God [v. 17]

Being wise in the use of our time presupposes that we be wise to discern the Lord’s will for us. We must see time in terms of God’s purpose for us. Time problems occur when we try to do things apart from God’s will, and live our lives according to our own fancy. Whenever we find ourselves cluttered with so many things to do and not able to accomplish anything, we should perhaps ask ourselves: “What is this that I’m busy with? Have I been busy for the Lord?”

Wise use of time provides a way of walking carefully before God and of proving His will. Ignorance of God’s will is folly, whereas an acquaintance with God’s will and a commitment to comply with it speak of true wisdom. It is not uncommon that people seem to value time most when they sense that death is near. It is when time is almost gone that many would look back with regret, saying, “I should have done this, I should have done that.” Such remorse is indicative of one’s inability to discern and pursue God’s will in his life. He who has lived his life walking in wisdom and understanding the will of God, ought to be able to say like Paul, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

Redeeming our Time [v. 16]

Finally, to “number our days” requires that we make the most of our time “redeeming the time”, or (literally) “buying the opportunities”. The Bible challenges us to do so by making the most of the time God has given us. We must see time as opportunities, availing ourselves of whatever opportunities that come our way to do good in the midst of our present predominantly evil times. We must also realise how vulnerable we are to the devil’s schemes when it comes to the use of time. If Satan can fool us into making bad use of our time, he would be successful in minimizing our effectiveness for the Lord and His church!

CONCLUSION

Dear readers, time is swiftly passing away. The brevity of time means that opportunities are passing by quickly; we either use them or lose them! Let us ask God to help us allot our days wisely in the light of eternity. May we use the time and opportunities that God has bestowed upon us wisely for His glory, “while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1)!